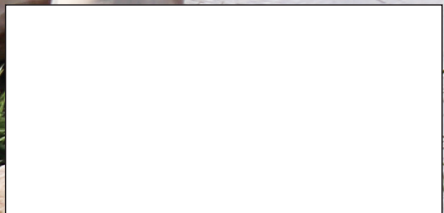


A fly fisherman in a white cap, olive green jacket, and tan waders stands on the left, casting a fly into a river. A rainbow trout is captured mid-jump in the center of the frame. The background features a rocky waterfall and a calm river. The text 'Trout' is written in a large, green, outlined serif font, with the fish integrated into the letter 'o'.

Trout

Talk

APRIL/MAY 2021



**Find out what's happening
at the Nature Center**

Page 3

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The Nature Center hosts a variety of events

Park naturalist Chambers talks about what's going on at the Nature Center

LAURA VALENTI FOR TROUT TALK

Like everyone else in 2020 and now in 2021, Patricia Chambers, Bennett Spring's Naturalist Resource Interpreter, has had her hands full dealing with the coronavirus pandemic and its impact on her work. Her job of sharing the many blessings of Bennett Spring with visitors and residents alike has been complicated by this last year's world-wide developments and restrictions.

"We had just changed things around inside the Bennett Spring Nature Center to better accommodate visiting school classes and small groups with an overhead projector and a place for spectators but then COVID struck and we couldn't use it as we had planned," Patricia Chambers explained on a bright spring day at the beginning of the 2021 trout season. "We used to have 200 school kids through here a day but most of those programs are done electronically."

Like so many others, Chambers had to develop new strategies to help keep people safe during the pandemic.

"A majority of our programming is going virtual and can be found on the Missouri State Parks Facebook page as a number of school districts have discontinued field trips this year. Several of the parks have their own Facebook pages but Bennett Spring does not," Chambers said. "Some of the parks in larger population areas like St. Louis have not been allowed to open at all due to city and county regulations. Every state park is different. We have continued to do some smaller programs here, like last month when we did a bird house building class and used masks and social distancing."

See NATURE CENTER on Page 5



Trout Talk photo/Laura Valenti

Bennett Spring State Park's Naturalist Resource Interpreter Patricia Chambers poses for a picture with the new Missouri Bicentennial Quilt that is now on display at the park's Nature Center.

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Nature Center

from page 3

Despite the pandemic, Chambers says the parks more than 12 miles of hiking trails have remained popular.

"We have even had a number of people stop in from the East and West Coasts, as they have explored the Lebanon area as a possible new home. That's been impressive in that they want to check out Bennett Spring as one of our area's best features as they consider moving to Missouri," Chambers said.

New to this year is a quilt series that has produced two new quilts, now on display at the park's nature center. These bicentennial quilts, made to celebrate Missouri's 200th anniversary this year, include a unique quilt square from each state park and historical site.

"Each month produces a new square, using a different quilting technique. In the month of March, for instance, we made a log cabin square

and in April, we'll be doing a trout block," Chambers said.

The group meets at 11 a.m. on the fourth Thursday of each month. The monthly meetings include an interpretive program on that particular topic.

Karen Jaegers teaches the quilting techniques involved at each meeting. Vicky Harding prepped and pieced the finished quilts. Connie Weber and Joyce Ball long-arm quilted the two displayed quilts.

The Nature Center also has monthly hikes planned. Each hike centers on a different bird in the area. In April, the hike featured the hummingbird.

"We have indoor as well as outdoor activities, depending on the weather and those use pre-packaged materials in sanitized areas that have been thoroughly wiped down," Chambers said.

In addition to the those non-fishing activities, Danny Goldsmith is teaching fly rod building at the Nature

Center. Participants bring a kit that can be purchased online or at a local fishing shop. Danny supplies glue and thread and shows people how to put it all together and put weight on it. His first program was in April and will be repeated at 6 and 9 p.m. on August 13 and 14. This activity is open to beginners as well as those looking for a few new tricks of the trade.

Also in April, the Nature Center hosted a blacksmith who used traditional tools and operated a coal forge.

As a part of Missouri's observation of the state's bicentennial celebration this year, she and volunteers have also been compiling old photographs of historic Bennett Spring in an effort to identify as many people as possible.

"The Lebanon-Laclede County Library is helping with that," Chambers said. "They are going to scan them, so that they can be added to our

permanent collection in Jefferson City as a part of their historical materials. They can be used at a later date for programs."

Bennett Spring Nature Center is also currently playing foster home to a couple of live snakes for the Master Naturalist of Springfield who retired recently until someone else can be found to care for them. In the meantime, they are on display at the center.

Finally, the Nature Center will be hosting an Explorer day camp the first two weeks of June. This event is being coordinated through Lebanon School District by Laura Latall. Participants will earn an Explorer Patch and Youth State Park Volunteer Patch. Mornings will be spent fishing and afternoons exploring, learning life skills and knowledge to increase their awareness of the outdoors. The program will be held throughout June.

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Every year, thousands of anglers flock to Bennett Spring State Park to celebrate the first day of trout season on March 1

STEVE SMITH • TROUT TALK

Anglers returned to Bennett Spring State Park March 1 for Opening Day of trout season.

According to Missouri State Parks, the opening of the catch-and-keep trout fishing season on March 1 is an important Missouri tradition, marking the beginning of a season that runs until Oct. 31. This year's Opening Day

brought both newcomers and longtime fishermen.

Jim Wiseman of Slater said he had been coming to Bennett Spring for more than 20 years. Wiseman visited Bennett Spring Monday with a friend. Although he'd been fishing there for a long time, his work as a farmer for the past 47 years has kept him from making it on opening morning. Now

that he is retired, he was finally able to take up his friend's offer to go with him to fish at the park on the first day of trout season.

"I always had cattle. Now I don't have to mess with that, I don't have any cattle," he said. "He invited me to come, I thought I've never done that, I'll get this off my bucket list."

At about 8 a.m., Wiseman said he

has already caught some fish and was enjoying the day.

"It's peaceful," he said. "I just enjoy trout fishing, always have."

Brent Young of Blue Springs said this was his first visit to the state park.

"It's my first time trout fishing," Young said, "I'm having a blast so far, haven't caught anything, but I'm having a good time."

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He said he enjoyed just being outside.

"I like just coming out here, the nature, the weather, just enjoying yourself, relaxing and having a little fun," he said.

Mark McGrath, 62, of Columbia, has been visiting Bennett Spring since he was 8 years old. On the morning of Opening Day, he said his day was

just starting.

"I was waiting for the sun to come over the hill," he said. "I plan to fish quite a bit today, stay tomorrow and maybe some of the crowd will get out of here."

On Opening Day, there were more than 3,000 trout tags sold at Bennett Spring State Park Store.

The parks' campgrounds, lodging

units and restaurants were all busy for the annual event.

Anglers and park visitors are encouraged to follow social-distancing guidelines and wear face coverings where a 6-foot distance from others cannot be maintained. Visitors should come prepared with water and hand sanitizer, and dressed appropriately for the weather. The parks will not

have warming stations as in past years and fish cleaning stations will remain closed.

Trout anglers are required to have a fishing permit and a daily trout tag to fish in Missouri's trout parks and can learn more at huntfish.mdc.mo.gov/huntfish/seasons/trout-parks. Tags can be purchased at the Bennett Spring State Park Store.

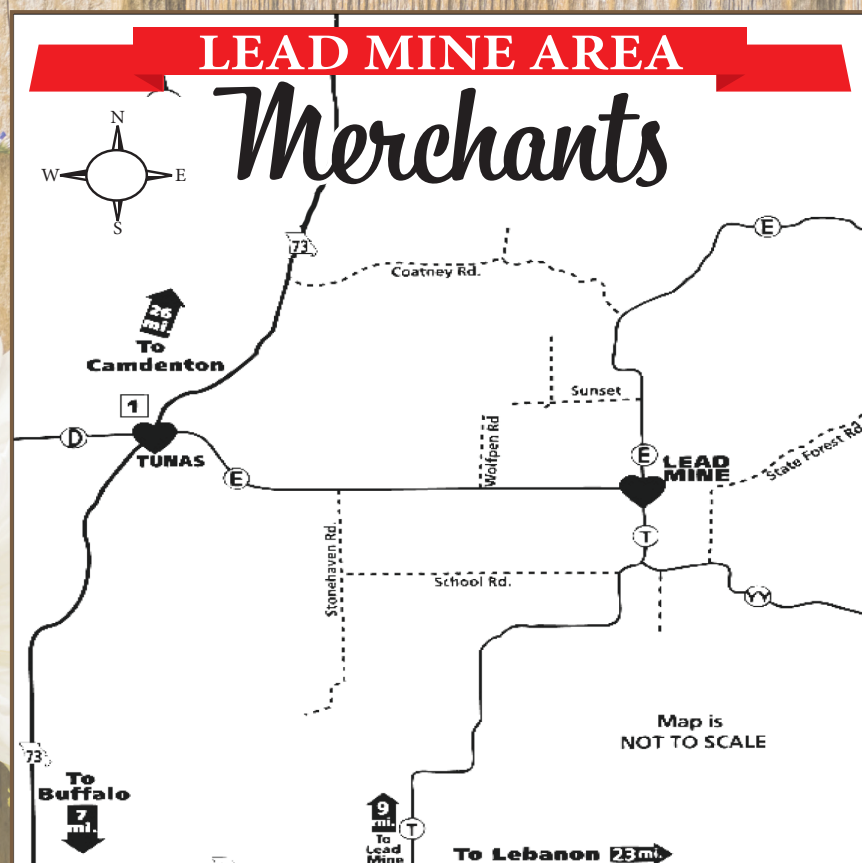
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Upcoming Events at Bennett

Monthly Hikes

Bennett Spring will be hosting monthly birding activities geared toward youth but open to all ages. Each month will feature a different species. Programs will begin at 10 a.m. with a hike to see the birds' preferred habitat, followed by a related come and go activity at the nature center.

■ May 15 – Vultures (meet at Shelter B bathrooms at the Whistle Trail for hike)

■ June 19 – Spring Birds

■ July 3 – Bald Eagles

■ August 21 – Songbirds, program presented by Paige Witek off Missouri Young Birders Club from the Missouri River Bird Observatory

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Bennett Spring State Park Rules and Hours



FISHING REGULATIONS

The spring branch is stocked daily during the regular fishing season, which is March 1 through Oct. 31. Daily permits are required to fish on the spring branch and zones are set aside for different kinds of lures. Permits are available at the park store. For more information, call (417) 532-4307.

ZONE 1: From the hatchery dam upstream to the end of the area. Only flies are permitted.

ZONE 2: From the hatchery dam to the whistle bridge. Only flies and artificial lures are permitted.

ZONE 3: From the whistle bridge to the Niangua River. Only soft plastic bait (unscented), natural and scented bait are permitted. All flies and artificial lures are prohibited, even if natural bait or

scent has been added.

Zone areas are marked in the park and maps are also available in the Park Store.

Trout Fishing Hours

April: 7 a.m. to 7:30 p.m.

May: 6:30 a.m. to 8:15 p.m.

June and July: 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m.

August: 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

September: 7:30 a.m. to 7:15 p.m.

October: 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

PARK HOURS

Park Grounds: Sunrise to one hour past sunset, daily

DINING LODGE HOURS

7 a.m. to one hour after the whistle during trout season

NATURE CENTER HOURS

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10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday

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Meet the rainbow trout

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Species: Rainbow trout

Scientific name: *Oncorhynchus mykiss*

Claim to fame: Rainbow trout are a popular sportfish in Missouri. Studies have shown trout fishing in the state provides a multi-million dollar benefit to the state's economy each year. The Missouri Department of Conservation stocks more than 1.5 million trout annually in the state.

Species status: Rainbow trout are not native to Missouri, but were first imported here in the 1800s. The rainbow trout's native range stretches along the Pacific Coast from Alaska to northern Mexico.

First discovered: The first scientific description of the fish was written by Russian naturalist Johann Julius Walbaum in the 18th century.

Family matters: Rainbow trout belong to the salmonidae family of fish.

This family includes several species high in angling popularity such as brown trout, salmon, char and whitefish.

Length: The average length is 10 to 15 inches, but longer lengths have been reported.

Diet: Aquatic insects, terrestrial insects, snails and small fish make up the bulk of a rainbow trout's diet. There is some variance based upon local availability of food.

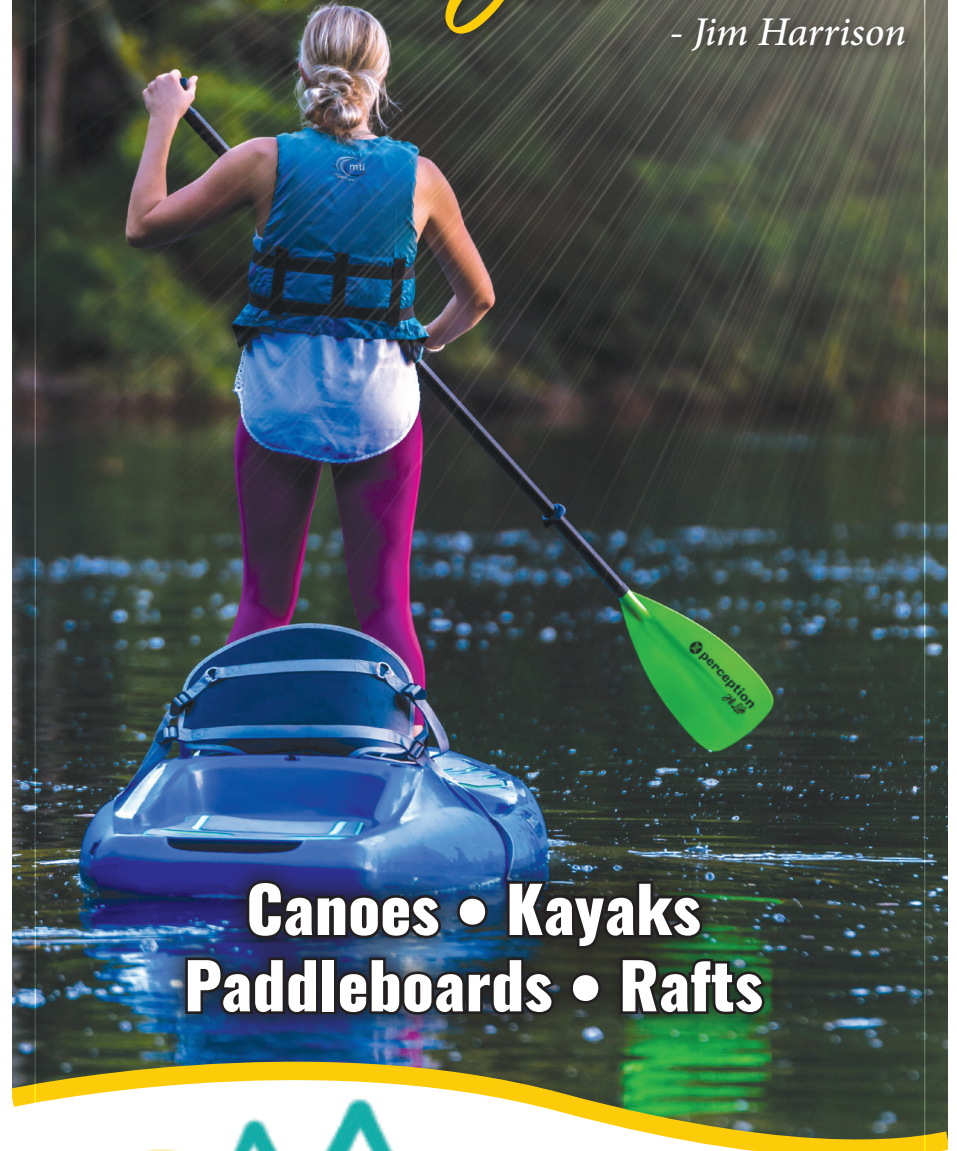
Weight: Most adult rainbows caught in Missouri range in weight from under one pound to one-and-one-half pounds, but they can grow larger.

Life span: Rainbow trout have been reported to live up to 11 years in some parts of the country.

Habitat: Within their natural range, rainbow trout inhabit streams, naturally occurring lakes and reservoirs. Trout do best in waters that generally remain below 70 degrees.

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Longtime fisherman kicks off Opening Day

STEVE SMITH TROUT TALK

Longtime Bennett Spring fisherman Wayne Simpson of Bolivar was honored this year with kicking off Opening Day.

A new twist this year is that the season was opened with an outdoor ceremony and the firing of a starting pistol. Bennett Spring State Fish Hatchery Manager Ben Havens said this ceremony is similar to what is done in other state parks.

“We’re finally joining that bandwagon, mainly due to COVID, so we can keep people safe out,” he said. He added that more than 7,000 fish were stocked in the spring for Opening Day.

The pistol starting the season will be fired by Wayne Simpson.

“Wayne is a super guy and well deserving of the honor and he is a really excited about getting the season started,” Havens said.

Simpson, 78, started fly fishing with his parents when he was 10 years old and caught his first trout at Roaring River State Park.

“My dad made it a point to come to Bennett Spring State Park every 3 to 4 weeks where he taught me more about fly fishing,” Simpson said. “My biggest fish of 5 pounds was caught many years ago at the spring head here in the park. March 1, 1975 was the first time I went to Opening Day and have been coming to opening day for the next 46 years.”

Simpson started tying flies for himself in 1973.

“I was self-taught but studied from a lot of books authored by some of the most famous fly tyers. Bob Gaston was also one of the first people who gave me encouragement. I have tied thousands of flies over the years,” he said. “When I retired, I started fly tying classes at Larry’s Sporting Goods during the summer and part of winter seasons, taught beginning fly tying classes for some interested Southwest Baptist University students at Bolivar, demonstrated at the Sowbug for eight years in Mt. Home, Arkansas, Tri-Lakes



Simpson

Expo for 7 years Branson Expo, and several events at Bennett Spring State Park over the years. He also put on a workshop at Fly Fishers International Annual Expo in Livingston, Montana.”

Simpson belongs to the following organizations: Capital City Fly Fishers, Federation of Fly Fishers International, Mo. Trout Unlimited, Fly Tyers of the Long Table, Ozark Fly Fishers, and Northern Ark. Fly Fishers.

“Most recently I have been participating in the Mayfly Organization with a group here in Bennett. I have been for four years the co-coordinator for the Reel Recovery Organization for the State of Mo. that annually provides a free 3-day retreat for men with cancer,” he said.

Simpson dedicated this Opening Day to his friend, Mike Ross, who was his fishing and fly-tying buddy for 18 years.

“He inspired me with his fishing and tying abilities,” Simpson said. “He passed away last year on March 4, just three days after Opening Day. He taught me about tying soft hackle flies. He was not only a great fisherman here at Bennett Spring but also a commercial fly tyer and developed a lot of flies we use here at Bennett Spring State Park.”

A walk in the park

There's a lot more to do at Bennett Spring State Park than fish for trout

Each month Trout Talk puts the spotlight on a different trail at Bennett Spring State Park.

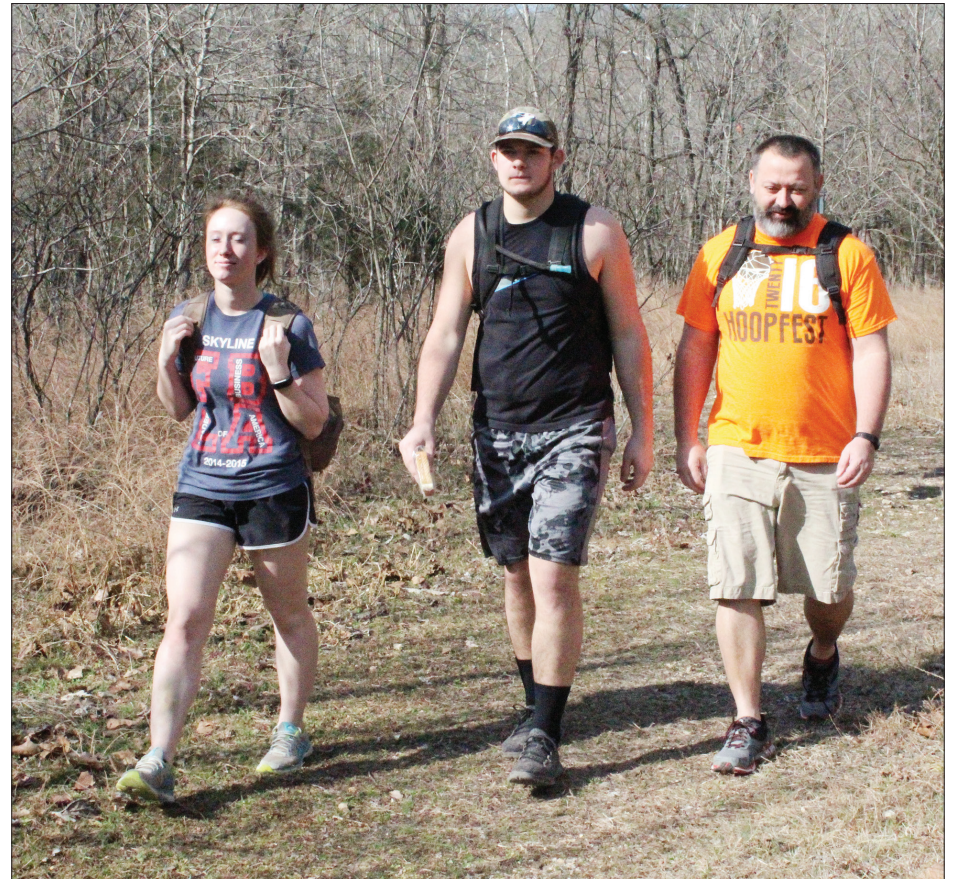
This month Trout Talk takes a look at one of the park's most unique and popular walking trails: the Natural Tunnel Trail.

The trail's signature feature is the Bennett Spring Natural Tunnel, which is 296 feet long and forms an S curve through the hill.

Formed from Gasconade dolomite, the tunnel contains a large gravel creek bed. On its way to the tunnel, the trail crosses Spring Hollow and passes through many different habitats. The trail is a combination of roads used by people living in the area from

the 1840s to present and rugged wooded areas crossed by small streams. The wooded areas support abundant wildlife including deer, squirrels, chipmunks, many woodland birds and insects, including ticks. Several bluffs have interesting geologic features, tiny caves, sheer rock faces and deep overhangs with vines and other foliage.

The trail passes near a small cemetery that dates from the late 1880s and holds the graves of two families who lived in the area. The length of the trail is 7.5 miles with an estimated hiking time of 5 hours and 45 minutes.



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